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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA-ERITREA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS DISCUSSIONS
ON THE MARGINS OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM EXECUTIVE BOARDS,
ROME, MAY 28-JUNE 3, 2003

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SUMMARY

1. (U) The growing threat of possible famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea was discussed on a number of occasions on the margins of the just concluded WFP Board sessions May 28-June 3, most notably in a lunch hosted by WFP Executive Director Morris on June 2 attended by the United States, European Commission, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Eritrea. Despite generous donor contributions, substantial shortfalls continue to exist as both countries start into the "long hungry season." End summary.

WFP luncheon on June 2

2. (U) WFP Executive Director Jim Morris hosted, at USDEL's request, a luncheon at WFP on June 2 attended by the United States, European Commission, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, and Eritrea (Ethiopia was invited but missed the lunch due to an act of the Roman gods).

3. (SBU) Morris began the discussion by saying he plans to appoint a WFP special representative for the region, along the lines of Judith Lewis' role in southern Africa this past year. He also noted that WFP had recently issued a new Emergency Operation EMOP (April 2003-March 2004) for Ethiopia covering 4.6 million of an estimated 12.5 million people at risk (40 percent). Meanwhile, the gap between pledges and actual resources has required WFP to reduce rations from 15 kg to 12.5 kg per person - a slow-starvation diet - as malnutrition rates continue to climb. Even if all the pledges are immediately fulfilled, the pipeline is expected to approach the breaking point in August. WFP has had to borrow from Ethiopia's emergency reserve stocks, which are now precariously low and must be reimbursed.

4. (SBU) Ethiopia has eclipsed an even worse situation in Eritrea, where the needs are immense, WFP has no carry-over stocks, and where EMOP coverage has been reduced from the planned 738,450 to 400,000 beneficiaries, at 60 percent rations. The new EMOP for Eritrea (May 2003-end February 2004) to cover 899,000 beneficiaries, is looking at a shortfall of 87,110 metric tons which will need to arrive as early as July. WFP is shifting some resources from its school feeding programs, as families abandon villages and trek in search of aid. Two regions are entirely without water, which according to WFP is scarcer and a bigger problem than food. Morris continued that during his visit to the region, he saw a dramatic difference between villages which had received even modest development assistance and those which had not, in terms of their ability to cope with the drought. He noted that Ethiopia and Eritrea are among

the largest recipients of relief aid and among the lowest for development. He added that the UN SYG would raise at the G-8 summit the need to mobilize a rapid and large response for the region. Morris said that Ethiopia and Eritrea are his top priority. Note: It was pointed out that Eritrea has not permitted food-for-work activities since

1996 and that DANIDA (Denmark) had withdrawn its development support to Eritrea's agricultural sector. End note.

15. (SBU) Ambassador Tony Hall welcomed Morris' comments and added that in his meeting earlier that day with Secretary Powell, he advised that the current crisis in the Horn appears to be as devastating as the famine of 1984. The Ambassador mentioned a proposal by Congressman Frank Wolf that the UN designate a special representative to mobilize an immediate and effective response. (The UK ambassador Anthony Beattie later noted that Irish rock musician Bob Geldof was again playing a prominent advocacy role for the Horn as he had previously done in 1984-85). Hall said that WFP appeared to be the only UN agency focused on responding to an enormous humanitarian crisis and that greater attention and involvement of the other UN relief agencies, as well as international donors, was needed now. DCHA/FFP Director Lauren Landis said that a USAID-funded nutritional survey/study to be released on June 6 indicated that there is, indeed, "a (potential) famine on our watch." Coping mechanisms are so exhausted and donor response has been so inadequate thus far, that she advised WFP may wish to consider revising upwards the total population at risk in Ethiopia from 12.5 to 14.4 million people.

16. (SBU) As donors did a tour de table, many complained that too few structural changes had been taken after the drought in the Horn in 2000. WFP's Judith Lewis and Manuel Aranda da Silva (WFP's Regional Manager for West Africa) countered that even under the best of circumstances, such changes would have required more than three years to prevent the recurrence of such a crisis in a region with neither the time nor the means to recover from successive natural disasters. Along with Morris, the Ambassador, and Landis, they re-focused the discussion on responding to the immediate needs and mitigating a potential famine.

17. (U) Later on June 2, the WFP Executive Board also noted a statement (submitted by the United States) calling upon donors to fulfill their pledges and provide additional resources for the emergency in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Morris stressed these same points in both the Executive Board meetings and the Resource Consultations with donors on June 13.

Text of U.S. Statement submitted to the Executive Board on June 2 which will be incorporated in the Summary of the Work of the Second Regular Session of the Executive Board, 2003

18. (U) Begin text of resolution:

(U) The Executive Board of WFP wants to express its sincere concern about the critical situation in the Horn of Africa. Given the pictures we have seen and the reports we have heard, we are seized with the reality that famine is again threatening people throughout Ethiopia and Eritrea. (U) As expressed in the Common Appeals Process, there are 12-14 million people threatened with starvation in Ethiopia and 1.5 million in Eritrea. Now more than ever, the world must realize the importance of taking immediate action in order to save lives. While we are familiar with the specter of famine in this region of the world, we must not let our consciences become tired of responding to those in need.

(U) We commend the World Food Programme for acting to feed almost eight million people, especially given the pressing needs elsewhere. While we recognize that there are many hungry people throughout the world and that we cannot neglect them, we see the crisis in the Horn of Africa as our top priority at this time.

(U) We urge the entire UN system and donor governments - both old and new, big and small - to recognize the magnitude and severity of the situation. We recognize the need to work together, especially when the immediate crisis has passed, in order to prevent this situation in the future. While our response to the threat of famine has improved, it still needs to be strengthened in order to guarantee that famine will never again threaten the Horn of Africa or elsewhere. Our moral duty demands no less.

(U) End text of resolution. Note: The Summary of Work is under circulation and will be formally endorsed by the Board at its next formal session. End note.

Operational discussions in USDEL side meetings

9 (U) In an earlier, separate meeting, WFP Central and East Africa Regional Director Holdbrook Arthur confirmed that the U.S. has covered 33 percent of the new EMOP for Ethiopia but unmet needs to date amount to another 200,000 MT. He

indicated that WFP has one-third of what it needs for Eritrea, where the new EMOP is 87,110 mts short. The Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) (January 2003-December 2004) is under funded to the tune of 83,050 mts.

110. (SBU) Holdbrook commented that WFP's Early Warning Matrix acknowledges that previous assessments had underestimated food aid needs in many parts of Ethiopia and notes that the U.S. and some other donors believe there is the potential for famine, with the peak of requirements from April to June. Meanwhile, floods in the Somali region of Gode have led to 100,000 people requiring immediate emergency assistance.

111. (U) According to an EC press release issued from Addis Ababa on May 26, the EC delivered 94,000 MT to Ethiopia in the period February 2003-end-May 2003, versus 407,250 MT

pledged for the year 2003. The press release included a delivery schedule for 212,500 MT to arrive end May-end August, as follows: 55,000 mts in May through Djibouti; 30,000 mts in June through Djibouti and 25,000 mts through Berbera; 62,500 mts in July through Djibouti and 25,000 mts through Berbera; and 15,000 mts in August through Berbera. This information was confirmed separately by FFP. Note: The EC shipments include cargoes for the GFDRE/DPPC, NGOs, ICRC and WFP. End note.

112. (SBU) According to WFP's Arthur, the WFP Ethiopia pipeline will likely break in August, and there is presently a serious shortfall of blended foods needed to prevent malnutrition among children under five. He confirmed that distributions of blended foods had been inadequate in the first half of 2003. Arthur added that there is a 300,000 metric ton shortfall for Ethiopia to cover needs through December.

113. (SBU) Arthur also indicated that rations to refugees in Ethiopia will probably be cut, including those for the repatriation of 25,000 Somalis. He could not answer State/PRM's questions about the substantive number of refugees and conflict victims dropped from the Eritrea PRRO 10192.0, e.g., the criteria used, any provisions for another donor to help this caseload, etc. PRM made its dissatisfaction clear and requested WFP to follow up immediately.

Comment

114. (SBU) Clearly considerable additional work needs to be done now to avert the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia and Eritrea from further spinning out of control. While remaining firmly committed to long-term "solutions," we need to intensify our focus on saving lives today. Hall
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